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Competence in Conflict Resolution Through Educational Practice

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Students can be successfully introduced to conflict resolution in the second half of primary school. With proper educational guidance, they can develop competence in conflict resolution, which includes: a willingness to overcome difficulties, an ability to reveal the contradictions that form the basis of the conflict, and possession of the skills necessary to resolve different types of conflict.

Keywords: abilities to conflict, conflict resolution, competence in subject.

Nobody likes the taste of yeast in the dough,
though the yeast made it rise after all.

Stanislav Ezhi Lets

In the course of our research and working with conflicts we proceed from the assumption that capacities and abilities to conflict and get the maximum benefit out of it is the basis for personal success and social capital formation. In other words, we consider conflict competence to be the key one for individual and social development. This proves the necessity of maximum utilization of educational resources to assist establishment of this competence. Meanwhile, we clearly see that insufficient formulation of relevant tasks for educational theories and practices is the main hindrance on the way to effective education.

Conflict theme can be either a kind of a scarecrow for a practicing teacher, who is encouraged to avoid conflicts by all possible means, or it is strongly imposed on a teacher, who receives recommendations to conduct special lessons up to introducing separate educational subjects to be taught starting from primary school in order to explain a child, as early as possible, what a conflict is and what is the right way to behave in conflict situation. This ambivalence is an important indicator for us, as it reveals the huge resources contained in the practice of a child facing educational subject related material through the intermediary of a teacher, which consequently represents indirect relationship of childhood and adulthood.

Thus, we consider one of our tasks to be provision of conflict competence genesis through disclosure and special creation of psychological-pedagogical facilities, already existing in modern educational practice.

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I. Correlation between conflict competence and competence in subject

We believe that the question of possibility to assist conflict competence genesis can be raised in the second half of primary school course already, as it is the period when, according to development teaching concept and provided that relevant educational technologies are fully realized, we have a right to expect the first effects of educational independence.

In this regard, research devoted to conflict competence genesis in school inevitably faces the question of correlation between activity aimed at development of productive conflict resolution capacity and activity directly connected with teaching school subjects proper. This is the very question we have raised in the context of correlation between subject and metasubject education. In this context, conflict competence acts as an effect of metasubject education. But its genesis requires the educational material to be organized in a special way. In this regard, our research orientation altogether corresponds to organization of educational tasks within the system of developmental teaching. At the same time, we believe that it is possible to detect appearance of such an effect as conflict competence only using subject-indifferent material, which enables us to indicate a person's capacity or incapacity to transfer the skill and apply it in unstandarized situations.

Talking about competence, we understand it (according to J.Raven [1]) as personal efficiency within the given (imputed) framework of activity. Prerequisite for display and, apparently, for appearance of competence is personal pertinence of activity: "It is important for me to cope with the task, to succeed in the activity, that is why I put maximum effort and display my competence". If it is not important, not necessary, issue of competence is out of the question. This means that we just do not know if a person has it or not, because a failure in achieving the given result can be explained not only by lack of skill, but by lack of motivation for achievement as well.

In the context of education this means that competence being predefined, imputed according to the age or a year of study must correspond or correlate with a child's aspirations. In other words, these very aspirations – "I want to know, to be able to do, to overcome" – in the course of study transform into personal "I can" and only in this case we can speak about competence.

It is necessary to emphasize that according to Raven and some other authors (see also [2; 3] it is impossible to be competent and not know about it. This issue raises the questions, which refer to subject of teaching and formation of capacities. Is something, which is formed by teachers, and later on measured and enthusiastically detected by them, really a competence (or at least a capacity) of the student or it is the reflected effect of actions performed by the one, who forms and measures?

In order to organize research program and project the use of results obtained in the course of it, we formulate the following key these.

1. Thus, to establish competence it is necessary for a child to note and detect his own progression, to register his own transitions from "me incapable" to "me capable".

At the same time these "I can", when necessary, should be applied not only within the artificial framework of a school subject. A subject should transform from something that is studied into something that is applied and that really works. Moreover, it should be discovered by the child himself as something workable and applicable.

From our point of view, it is the normal logic of subject teaching, which is not self-contained, but serves the purposes of development. There should be a transition from mastering a subject as a subject for learning to discovering a subject as

a resource, means of working with other subject (see [4])

2. What is conflict competence? It is a complex of capacities enabling to resolve contradictions effectively. In this regard it is important for us that when we say "resolve" we do not imply ultimacy of actions, their completeness. What is important for us, it is the processual features of productive oriented action with the contradiction and conflicts representing it. Following our definition of a conflict as a special organization of activity, as a form, within which a contradiction is maintained in the process of its resolution, a person can be defined as the one possessing conflict competence, if he has mastered this form and is capable to distinguish it among any others. And the most important is that he can detect a contradiction and possesses the skills of maintaining it.

We suppose and this is a basic assumption, that the capacity of this type has its own line of development, which can be built in accordance with an age. This means that at each age stage there is a task (imputation!) to generate conflict competence of a definite level.

3. Variants of correlation between the dynamics of conflict competence genesis and subject education:

- doesn't matter what you teach, it will grow itself (if you teach well - it will grow to be good, if you teach badly - it will not be so good);

- it is necessary to teach intentionally and separately. No difference if it is during separate lessons or the same ones.

- special organization of subject education, which constructs connections between different lines (by "goal - means of achievement" principle and in reverse direction, when something what used to be a goal yesterday, today becomes a means of achieving the new goal).

If we manage to understand the connection between the actions to transform subject educational material with the actions, which define conflict competence, we will understand how to assist its genesis and help a student to achieve the new "I can".

4. Within the model of subject under study it is important to distinguish three layers of competence genesis logic.

■ Educational subject transformations (the layer of scientific subject logic and its didactic organization). The skill of specific normative transformation is formed within this layer, and this is the way how norms of organization and transformations in specific subject culture are mastered.

■ Conflict (the layer of actions organization on detection of gaps in one's own capacities to perform transformations when they are necessary; searching and creation of forms to keep the contradiction for resolution).

■ Self-perception (the layer, at which the connection between the other two takes shape, which is done by means of experiencing the transition from "it is necessary" to "I-want-but-I-can't" and further to "I can" accompanied by confirmation of what exactly "I can" and what made it possible and will make it possible from now on)

Capacities are always detected in the situation of overcoming, but they are confirmed as capacities and further as a personal competence, in case their application does not require special effort and becomes irreversible, impossible to be lost.

Thus, from our point of view, conflict competence cannot be considered as a separate goal and result of some special process, as well as a random effect (bonus) of subject education. It is established together with competence in subject and becomes a condition for effectiveness of the latter.

In other words, if we really want to achieve stable and transferable effects of subject education together with the same result for behaving in

a conflict as a metacapacity (one of the key competences), it is important to search educational technologies for connections of these lines in the connection: "goal – material – means of transformation". At the same time, it is impossible to achieve productivity in a subject as well only by means of complication and intensification of subject line.

II. Experimental investigation of connection between conflict competence and competence in subject

Thus, components of conflict competence are the following:

1. Willingness to overcome difficulties

2. Ability to reveal the contradiction, which forms the basis of the conflict

3. Possession of skills to resolve conflicts of different types

Being the main means to resolve conflicts, reflection provides the possibility to transform the situation of uncertainty into a "task-type" situation. In other words, it means to arrange the "circumstances" a person finds himself in into a construction-conflict, resolution of which will become resolution of the conflict.

At the final stage of primary school, according to age tasks and imputations of educational programs, students can achieve a certain level of conflict competence, which will enable them to:

1. Effectively resolve conflicts of non-educational subject in the course of group work (via cooperative formulation of the task and organization of cooperation)

2. Differentiate and maintain in the scope of resolution 2 types of transformations: subject-related and organizational.

Thus, the task and contribution of primary school age into formation of conflict competence consists of 1) acquisition of capacity to distinguish object matters of transformations (which is the basic capacity for effective resolution of a conflict and will further become the basis of distinguishing between an object and material of the conflict, further - between interests and intentions of the parties) and 2) recognition of interaction as a resource for resolution.

From our point of view, prerequisite for formation of these capacities is a teacher's treating of an educational subject as a means of activity, rather than an object for exploration and studying only. In its turn, this is possible only by organizing such interaction of children during the lessons, in the context of which an educational subject is treated only as a ground for cooperation and its further reflection. We have conducted an experiment, in the course of which we made an attempt to:

- create a situation of uncertainty, which is necessary to overcome (situation of personal pertinence for the participants)

- detect phenomena of distinguishing different type of material in group work

- compare, according to these criteria, students of the classes, where different pedagogical strategies of educational interaction organization have been implemented.

The procedure of the experiment was organized on the following way.

Within the context of a school-wide event "Remember your classroom" a form master acquaints a class with a group of adults who will make a short video about their classroom. To do this, they will have to select a team of four people, who will act as scriptwriters and narrators. In order to select the best team they organize a game, which will detect the most quick-witted students and those, who are able to work together as a team. The rules of the game are the following:

Conductor of the game thinks about a word indicating some object inside the classroom. Task of the teams is to figure out the word. Doing this, they have to follow some rules. A team can

ask the conductor some questions, which can be answered with "yes" or "no" only. Teams take turns. The first team has 15 tries, i.e. they can ask 15 questions. If they still cannot figure out the word, the turn goes to another team. They can ask 13 questions. If they do not succeed in making out the word, the turn goes to the next team, which has 11 questions. The team, which figures out the word, is the winner. It gets 1 point. Altogether there are 3 rounds, order of turns changes in every round. The team, which gets the most points, is the winner. Number of questions asked is indicated on the blackboard.

The whole procedure is recorded; groups include observers, who keep the minutes of the discussion.

Once the first round was finished, students were given some time to discuss the course of the game, there were no definite tasks set for this discussion.

We have conducted this game in three 4th grades in the middle of academic year. In total 36 students took part in the experiment. The classes differed in teaching system applied, as well as system of pedagogical actions concerning organization of educational cooperation.

The first group represented the class being taught according to the traditional teaching system, and the teacher did not set any tasks for the development of cooperation skills (hereinafter - TT)

The second group was the class, representing developmental teaching system. The teacher actively applied group and pair wise forms of work; this was done, however, only to facilitate an effective digestion of the subject relevant material. Interaction was not a separate object of the teacher's and students' activity (hereinafter - DT).

The third group included students of the class, where developmental teaching included a teacher's purposeful and systematic use of the form of educational cooperation and realization of an integral program, aimed at transfer of interaction skills to the students. Interaction was discussed as an independent subject within the educational process (hereinafter – DT+).

Within the given experimental situation we were interested in the following:

1. Do the students of these classes differ in selecting the solution strategy?

2. Is it possible to discern differences in the forms of interaction and ways of its organization?

3. Do students of the final stage of primary school treat the subject relevant material and interaction as different objects of activity?

Analysis of the questions asked to the conductor of the game enabled us to mark out questions of strategic search and chaotic search. We referred a question to strategic type, if the answer obtained defined the further actions of the team (if the answer is "yes", we ask about...; if the answer is "no", then...). Every question within the framework of a strategy is linked to the previous one. Chaotic search is represented by questions-enumerations, which lack any system logic and special plan of figuring out some feature or obtaining some specific information. As a rule, this type of search is accompanied by active inspection of the classroom, "visual search". Participants just try to guess the word and in most cases a negative answer bears no information, except for "we didn't guess".

Another type of questions should be mentioned separately; these are the questions of pseudoreflexive type. By its form the question can be referred to a group of objects, it is a try to figure out some feature, but the content of the question is referred to a specific object. For instance, a team asks a question "Is this used to make a video?" meaning a videocamera, or "Do we use this to write on the blackboard?" meaning chalk etc. It should be noted that instructions for the

game did not include any restrictions for naming the object. Only once such questions were the result of one of students misunderstanding of the instructions. Cases of pseudoreflexive utterances were registered in each class with no exception, in some groups such type was predominant. This phenomenon means for us that there was a try of external correspondence with the "right" way to act without any reflexive attitude towards it. Having an intuitive[1] feeling of "how it should be", students seem to act like this, but they do not apply the method of strategic search. We register stereotype action following the example of reflexive operations, which are not mastered as a method of operation.

Table1. Ratio of utterances by type of search

Utterance type	Class		
	TT	DT	DT+
Strategic search, %	3,5	6	14
Chaotic search, %	58	56	43
Pseudoreflexion, %	34	45	24

The table represents the percentage ratio of different types of utterances made by 4th grade students.

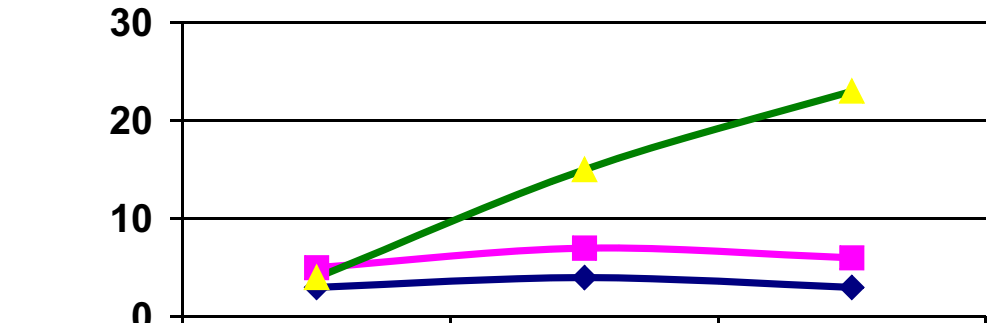
The following results of analysis refer to the dynamics of search methods in the course of the game. We remind that the procedure consisted of three rounds. It was important for us to compare search methods used in different rounds. In order to do this, we compared the percentage of strategic search utterances in all classes starting with the first round and up to the third.

Results of the comparison are represented by the graph (Figure 1).

The graph data make it obvious that the dynamics of strategic utterances is positive only in DT+ class. With figures being practically the same in the first round, which represents spontaneous activity of children for us, some significant differences came up towards the third round. These quantitative indicators made us turn to analysis of subjective data. The first round was detected to be of provisional character with task specifications being understood and some tries of spontaneous actions being made (chaotic search). The pause before the second round allows framing up the problem and proposing the ways of effective activity. They are realized during the second round. Effective realization is connected with distribution of functions within the group (organization of interaction) and discussion of solution strategy during the whole time of the round (subject related transformation). In this case by the beginning of the third round strategy starts to dominate and percentage of chaotic utterances considerably decreases.

In case of orientation in task specifications in the first round being unsuccessful and discussion of possible ways being just a formality, increase of strategic utterances percentage in the second round is followed by decrease up to the initial level by the third round. We see the reason of it in failing to realize agreements within the team. We consider it to be a sign of students knowing "how it should be", trying to do so, but not keeping it in their own activity. We dare to suppose that, in case of the teacher being present and him organizing the work, these attempts would have had continuation. Thus, students of DT class can face some difficulties and try to overcome them, but they are not able to keep to reflexive position during group interaction.

[1] We make a conclusion about intuitive feeling, basing on the fact that there was no case of a group discussing such type of questions as adequate, effective or ineffective. That means that this way of operation was not comprehended, but was rather a case of acting by stereotype.



	1 round	2 round	3 round
TT	3	4	3
DT	5	7	6
DT +	4	15	23

Fig. 1. Dynamics of strategic search in the course of the ga

We have also discovered significant differences in forms of interaction in different classes. In this case during the first round almost all groups demonstrate direct interaction "individual participants – conductor" and a group does not function as an organized team. Further, after extension of task specifications definition and formulating the method of solution, some other forms appear in DT classes. In the first class we observed predominance of "individual participants – leader – conductor" interaction, and this form of interaction is kept until the end of the game. Thus, there is some organization of the work and questions are not asked at random. This means that, if we judge by formal features, the group is structured and some method of operation is worked out. This method, however, is not coordinated with the content of subject related transformation (though the group is organized, this organization does not serve the task of defining the way of searching).

In DT+ class this stage is practically not observed, individual actions in the first round are followed by group discussion of the solution strategy, which then defines the form of interaction. Further the group discusses and makes a decision about the question to be asked altogether.

This allows us to make a conclusion that distinguishing of two types of material (interaction and subject related transformation) is a key efficiency factor in this experiment. We see phenomena of such distinguishing in the work of DT+ class students. This means that it is possible for students of the final stage of primary school to distinguish and maintain two layers of educational interaction. And this does not require organization of special subjects or meta-subjects, as a corresponding level of competence is an effect of full realization of educational activity.

With special organization of educational subject discreetness by a teacher, with considering it as means for other activity realization, students of the final stage of primary school are mostly effective in overcoming situations of uncertainty and group solution of a conflict.

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